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A

THANKSGIVING SERMON,

PREACHED

ON THE 19TH OF DECEMBER, 1797.

BEING

THE DAY APPOINTED BY HIS MAJESTY'S ROYAL PROCLAMATION,
TO RETURN THANKS TO THE ALMIGHTY, FOR THE GREAT NAVAL
VICTORIES OBTAINED IN THE COURSE OF THE PRESENT WAR.

BY THE

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ISAIAH XLII.—VERSE 12.

LET THEM GIVE GLORY UNTO THE LORD, AND
DECLARE HIS PRAISE IN THE ISLANDS.

WHEN we consider the dependence of the Universe, and of every thing which it contains, upon the will of the Supreme Being; and reflect, how infinitely we are indebted to the great Arbiter of our happiness or misery, for the many daily proofs of his fatherly protection, and superintending care,—there can be no doubt, respecting the propriety of our offering up all praise and adoration, to the Divine Majesty of Him in whom “we live, and move, and have our being:” but when we contract our view within a narrow compass, and direct our eye towards the manifold advantages, which, as inhabitants of these kingdoms, we have derived from our civil and religious institutions;—from our insular situation, and from other circumstances;—when we contemplate

these

these blessings, which, by the all-gracious providence of GOD, are still vouchsafed to us, the feeling heart, warmed with gratitude, experiences an irresistible inclination humbly to adore our Almighty Benefactor.

WHAT these blessings are, for the preservation of which, we are at this time more immediately indebted to the fatherly goodness of our GOD; and also the duties, incumbent upon us to discharge, in order to ensure a well-founded hope of their being continued to us; it shall be my purpose, on the present solemn occasion, to open and explain.

As members of society, we enjoy the peculiar happiness of living under a form of government; which, from the accumulated wisdom of ages, has attained to as great a degree of perfection, as, perhaps, is compatible with the fallibility of all human institutions. It is to this circumstance, added to the exemplary character of the Sovereign, who, at this period, fills the throne, that we may, under the Divine Protection, ascribe the security, and comparative felicity, enjoyed by every description of British subjects, during the progress of an eventful contest:—at a time too, when the surrounding nations have

have, most of them, either fallen a prey to internal commotions, excited by the adoption of wild, and extravagant positions, the unhappy fruits of a vain and false philosophy, propagated by men of wicked design; or have been exposed to the most dreadful devastation, occasioned by the inroads of ambitious, and implacable enemies; who, under the specious pretence of redressing the wrongs of the lower classes of society, and vindicating the sacred cause of liberty; have, in every country, into which they have penetrated, plundered the rich, enslaved the poor; and, by their tyranny and oppression, have proved themselves the most formidable adversaries to true and rational liberty, that ever appeared to scourge mankind.

PROVIDENTIALLY, the good sense of the people of this country in general, the fidelity of its military force, together with the manly energy, and vigour of its councils, directed by that Almighty power, " who " causeth men to be of one mind, who stilleth the rag- " ing of the sea: and the noise of his waves, and the " madness of the people,"—have all combined to pre- serve these kingdoms from those scenes of rapine and
murder,

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murder, to which the neighbouring states have been the wretched victims.

THE truly benevolent man, who delights in the happiness of his fellow-creatures, experiences the most heartfelt satisfaction, when he observes the progress, which has been made to ameliorate the condition of the poor, and to support, in its relative dignity, every order of the state; even during the continuance of an expensive and bloody war. Wherever he turns his eye, he discerns improvements, struggling their way against the stream of an infinite number of adverse causes:—the cottage of the peasant ceases to be the miserable hut, where wretchedness and want sit shivering at the door. It is, at once, his castle, and his comfortable habitation; where, under the benign influence of equal laws, he fears not the oppressor's wrong;—where he enjoys a portion of felicity, not always to be met with in the palace;—and where, if tenanted by industry, and sobriety, is found the usual seat of peace, health, and contentment.

THAT real happiness, however, is not necessarily confined to these humble scenes, our country affords a brilliant

a brilliant and striking proof in the example of our august Sovereign, and his Royal Consort; whose private virtues add a lustre to their high station, which no other attribute can give; and which have made them happy in the esteem and love of their subjects; whilst, at the same time, they have acquired them the confidence of an admiring world. And, indeed, when we consider the mischievous consequences, which a great influx of wealth has always a tendency to introduce, and has in fact introduced throughout the various orders of society in these kingdoms, it should seem not unreasonable to conclude, that we are in no small degree, indebted to the private, as well as public virtues of the reigning Monarch for the gracious interposition of God's providence, in securing to us internal tranquillity, and in blessing the arms of our country with those public triumphs over the enemy, which we are this day called upon, humbly, and gratefully to acknowledge; nor is the conclusion unwarranted by sacred authority. It was the piety of the king of Judah, that drew down from Heaven the blessing of peace upon a sinful people. " Because
" thine heart was tender, saith the Lord God of
" Israel, and thou hast humbled thyself before the
" Lord,

" Lord, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before
" me: I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Be-
" hold, therefore, I will gather thee into thy fathers,
" and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace." And most devoutly is it to be wished, that the example, now before this country, may make so deep an impression upon those, whom Divine Providence may hereafter vouchsafe to call to the throne of these kingdoms, as to induce them to reflect, that nothing is more likely to contribute to the peace and security of a reign, than a diligent and constant practice of the moral and social virtues.

WHATEVER the superficial infidel of the present day may think, or the discontented factious demagogue may insinuate, men of cool reflection, and sober reasoning, will not easily be persuaded to believe, that the kind father, and indulgent husband will ever, in public life, become a cruel, and relentless tyrant; or harbour views, hostile to the liberties, or prosperity of mankind. Men of piety and virtue, of every rank, and even the most ignorant, who have generally more common sense, than some would willingly allow them, will place confidence in such a character; and live contented

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contented under the guardianship of the laws, administered by the fostering care of a patriot king.

IN our present excellent Governor, we behold the most exemplary piety, uncontaminated either with superstition, or bigotry; who, while he is anxiously solicitous for the prosperity, and happiness of his peaceable and loyal subjects, displays a manly fortitude, and firmness, in resisting the demands of the turbulent, and discontented; well knowing, that nothing is more absurd in practice, or more dangerous to the public weal, than the endeavour to conciliate the submission of men, whose only objects are—the raising of their own reputation, and the accumulation of wealth from the general plunder of the state.

THAT honest and well-meaning persons, should sometimes be imposed upon by the specious arguments of the ambitious and designing, may easily be imagined: perhaps, therefore, it would contribute, in no small degree, to the peace and security of such, as are exposed to this danger, were they to make a minute inquiry into the character, and situation of those, whose patriotic zeal is sounded forth, with so much noise

noise and clamour. It would then be not unfrequently found,—that the dissolute apprentice;—the insolvent tradesman;—the ruined spendthrift;—and men, in general, without the smallest pretension to a single virtue,—are the pretended patriots of the present day.—What is the obvious tendency of such kind of patriotism as this, it is not very difficult to conjecture. “ Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? No! “ a good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and a corrupt “ tree bringeth forth evil fruit;—wherefore by their “ fruits ye shall know them.”

THAT youth should sometimes submit with too much reluctance to those restraints, which its own happiness and the welfare of society demand, must be a subject of regret; but it can never be one of surprise, that those, whom pride, indolence, or extravagance, has deprived of the honourable distinctions, and affluence, which, in a country like this, will ever be the reward of superior industry, and abilities, should regard, with an envious eye, the attainments, which themselves have not virtue or wisdom to acquire; nor is it, in any degree, contrary to reasonable expectation, that the prodigal, who has dissipated, in low and vicious pursuits,

pursuits, the patrimony, obtained by the valour, or wisdom of his ancestors, should look forward to the only resource he has left,—the plunder of his more honest and industrious neighbour.

So arrogant, and presumptuous is the unprincipled part of the community too frequently found, that it is by no means uncommon to behold men, who, in the management of their private concerns, have betrayed a total want of judgment, and even of capacity and common honesty, not only openly arraigning those, who sit at the helm of the state, vainly imagining themselves able to regulate the affairs of a mighty empire; but, daringly attacking the wisdom, and purity of our political, and ecclesiastical establishments:—establishments, whose combination has formed a basis to the most beautiful fabric of civil, and religious liberty, that ever stood,—the admiration of mankind, or called for the gratitude of a favoured people.

WHEN we consider the principle of that alliance, which has happily been formed between the church, and the state in this country; and reflect, how admirably they have administered strength to each other; so

that arguing, as well from reason as experience, we are obliged to conclude, that they must stand or fall together,—we must necessarily admit, that those who betray an implacable hatred to the one, cannot be considered otherwise, than as equally hostile to the other: nor can the suspicion be deemed incandid, that those, who manifest an unamiable want of charity towards the mild evangelical religion, which we profess, are not only enemies to revealed religion in general, but are actuated by the conviction, that our own is the support of that civil constitution, and of that throne, which they are secretly, and industriously endeavouring to destroy.

WHEN, further, we consider how admirably our holy religion is calculated to make men good subjects, by making them *first* good Christians; and thus to secure to us the civil blessings we now enjoy, it is much to be lamented, that the public worship of our God is so much neglected.

IN this, as in every thing else which respects human conduct, example is of the very first importance:—It is not, perhaps, too much to say, that its effect, in the instance before us, is greater than that of precept.

Together

Together they cannot fail, by improving the morals of the people, of being attended with great national advantage. It may therefore be hoped, nor is it to be doubted, that, when the Almighty shall vouchsafe the blessing of peace to his people,—the first offering of gratitude will be, a more general impression of the great truths of Jesus Christ's religion, in such manner, and by such means, as shall seem good to those pious and learned guardians of our national faith, who are at once the pillars, and the ornament of our ecclesiastical constitution. How naturally this hope rises in the mind of every person of sensibility, even of the most superficial observation, is suggested by the view of society as now before us. The unprincipled, the profligate, the dissipated, throughout every rank in human life, are found to be the first disturbers of social order.—Men of this kind will regard, with equally malignant eye, the well-earned independence of the honest and industrious,—the eminent distinctions acquired by men of superior virtue and abilities,—and the more public honors, bestowed upon the brave defenders of their country.

THEY

THEY will therefore readily enlist themselves under the banner of sedition ; and, while they are loud, with the cry of liberty in their mouths, tyranny and oppression usurp the entire dominion of their hearts : nor can any thing be more obvious, than that the turbulent resistance, offered to every mode of civil and religious restraint, arises from an over-weaning pride, joined to an inordinate desire to possess those honors and distinctions, to which the honest, the virtuous, and the brave, alone are justly entitled.

THE Church of England has justly been admired, not less for the purity of her doctrines, and the simplicity of her rites and ceremonies, than for ~~the~~ liberal and tolerant spirit : and let it be remembered, that the full and perfect toleration, in religious matters, extended to people of every persuasion, does not, in this country, proceed from state-policy ; or, as in some others, from a cold indifference to every mode of religious worship ; but is here the effect of that regard for liberty, so combined with, and inseparable from our establishments, both in church and state, that it may be considered as the animating principle, which gives life and energy to both.

both. And hence it is presumed, that religious men of every denomination, if they be really disciples of Jesus Christ, will, in the hour of public danger, stand forward, in defence of that form of government, under which, in common with their fellow-subjects, they enjoy so inestimable a blessing.

SINCE then persons of every description, within these kingdoms, are equally bound to be grateful for the personal security, and religious liberty, which they enjoy under our present form of government, it becomes us seriously to enquire, what are the means necessary to ensure a continuance of them,—how we may conciliate the gracious regard of that Being, without whose divine aid, all our efforts must prove vain and ineffectual; and without whose inspiring influence, all our boasted wisdom will end in folly and disappointment. If, for this purpose, we consult that sacred treasure of wisdom—the revealed word of God in the New Testament, we shall there find delivered to us in language, too plain, to be misunderstood,—we shall there learn from the mouth of our Divine Lawgiver, —the ever blessed, and adorable Son of God,—what those duties are, the practice of which will entitle us to
hope

hope for the protection of our Almighty Father.—They are these :—Our duty to God—our duty to our country—and our duty to ourselves.

LET it then ever be in our minds, that, as a bad man never can taste real happiness, so neither can he be a good neighbour,—a loyal subject, or a valuable member of society. It must therefore be regretted, that the idea should be so frequently cherished, and inculcated, of private vices not being incompatible with great public virtues; for, although it is acknowledged, that great mental abilities are not always found combined with a good heart; yet to this fatal delusion may be attributed, in a great degree, the barefaced immorality of the age.—“ What have we to do with the private character and conduct of the individual !”—will some well-disposed persons exclaim, without once reflecting, upon what foundation the fortune of individuals, and the fate of empires depend. Did they but consider, that it is a just and holy God, who hateth iniquity, upon whom every thing, animate and inanimate, ultimately relies for support; it would be evident, that a rational being, immersed in sin, and given up to immorality and vice, can never be a faithful friend, or servant

servant of the public. It cannot be expected, that the Supreme Author of all goodness will ever regard him with an eye of complacency, or prosper an undertaking committed to his charge. But the modern infidel will perhaps ask—" How comes it to pass, that the efforts " of a people, who do not even pretend to a semblance " of religion, should, notwithstanding, in so short a " time, have been crowned with such a series of vic- " tories and success, as to oblige every neighbouring " nation, our own excepted, to submit to their arms?" To this let it be answered,—that it seems good to the wisdom of God, frequently to make the most profligate of mankind the instruments, by which to bring about his great designs, and particularly to chastise the wickedness, and impiety of states.—A warning this to the inhabitants of this isle, to reform their manners, and amend their lives; that they may experience a continuance of the merciful protection of Heaven, which has been so singularly vouchsafed to them, during the present unparalleled struggle.

BUT, however superficial observation, tinged with infidelity, may be disposed to gaze, with admiration, at the havock, and confusion, which the nation alluded to,
has

has brought upon a great part of Europe;—yet, until it can be proved, that people are there more happy and prosperous,—that they enjoy a greater degree of civil liberty, and a larger portion of personal security, than under their former government, until this can be proved;—the good sense natural to every true-bred Englishman, will consider them, as now groaning under the severe vengeance of the Almighty's wrath, and an awful example to this country, to avoid their errors, and detest their crimes.

IN the midst of the present contest then, wars and rumors of wars blackening the horizon all around us, let us reflect, that we still are blessed with the comfort and support of Jesus Christ's religion; and with the enjoyment of a rational civil liberty, founded on its basis.—Let this reflection dispose every devout Christian, and good subject to wait, with calm resignation, for whatever ultimately may be the event. Should the danger approach, he will know his post, and will do his duty.—Amidst the ranks of his fellow-subjects, he will not be backward to meet the invading foe. He will not be tenderly solicitous for the preservation of a life, which, in a great national danger, his country has a right to demand,—which, extended to its utmost limit,

limit, can only be protracted for a few years,—perhaps too,—ignominious years! and which may, at any time, be considered, as well exchanged for a scene of glory, and immortality.

LET us, through every rank of life, cultivate the evangelical virtue of contentment, in our respective stations. In cheerful submission to the laws of our country, let us be loyal to our Prince, faithful to our Religion, kindly affectioned one towards another, extending our Christian charity to those, who may differ from us in opinion,—ever remembering, “that God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ, according to his Gospel.”

LET us, in our private, as well as public devotion, humbly implore that Being, by whom kings rule, that the endeavours of our Sovereign, towards the attainment of a secure and permanent peace, may be finally crowned with success. Let us not dread the haughty menaces of an imperious, and infatuated enemy; but let us humbly hope, and, in the recollection of the triumphs, which we this day celebrate, let us *cherish* the hope, “That the Lord of Hosts is with us; and that the God of Israel is our refuge.”

7 JU 66

